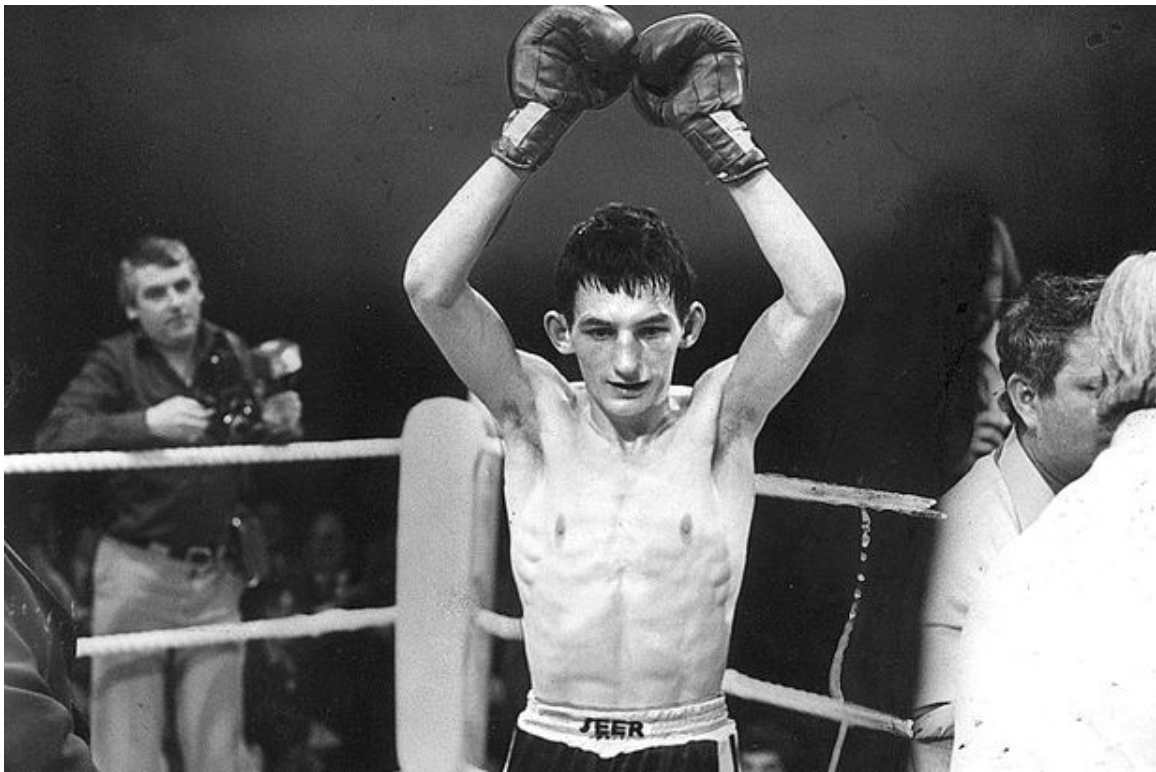


# THE WELSH MATCHSTICK

## JOHNNY OWEN



Read this outstanding play! It won't disappoint you!

Told in rhyme and straight from the heart.  
Thank you Stan the man. You are the best!  
In Johnny Owen's memory, I award you five stars.  
Outstanding memorial by playwright Stanley Dyrector,  
Honoring the memory of Johnny Owen.  
Powerful, gritty and honest!

*Fran Lewis ~ just reviews*

# THE WELSH MATCHSTICK - JOHNNY OWEN

One-Act Play

A Poetic ~ Prose Tribute

by STANLEY DYRECTOR

Copyright © May 2022 Stanley Dyrector and Off The Wall Play Publishers

<https://offthewallplays.com>

This script is provided for reading purposes only Professionals and amateurs are hereby advised that it is subject to royalty It is fully protected under the laws of South Africa, the United States of America, the British Empire including the Dominion of Canada and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights including but not limited to professional amateur film radio and all other media including use on the worldwide web and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved and any unauthorized use of the material may subject the user to any and all applicable civil and criminal penalties. For any information about royalties or to apply for a performance license please click the following link:

<https://offthewallplays.com/royalties-and-licensing-of-plays-sold-by-off-the-wall-plays/>

- i. Dedication
- ii. History
- iii. Characters
- iv. Prologue
- v. Setting
- vi. Play
- vii. Epilogue
- viii. Playwright's Note

### **Playwright's brief Bio**

Shedding Light on the Hollywood Blacklist (non-fiction),  
Foreword by Ed Asner.

Television writer.  
Playwright and Author  
Occasional Actor.

### **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this play to my friend, Georgie Small, a professional middleweight boxing contender who I trained with in the Catskill Mountains in Smallwood, NY. I was in my late teens and a wannabe Golden Gloves Champion. George Small was an inspiration to me. He helped to open my eyes to the importance of a person's character rather than their physical strength.

I would also like to dedicate this play to my dear friend, the renowned Seven-Time Emmy Award winning actor, the one and only, the incomparable Ed Asner. He has always been an inspiration to me.

## HISTORY

**The Welsh Matchstick** was first performed by the author at the **Writers Guild of America West**, Los Angeles, California, in 1980, under the title of **The Championship Fight**. It was also performed at other Los Angeles theaters, including **First Stage**. There have been a number of revisions.

## **CHARACTERS**

STAN is the main (and perhaps the only) character in the play; he should be animated with charisma. There are numerous transitions. The actor should be authentic, energetic, conversational and able to improvise a prizefighter's movements.

OPTION: At the director's discretion, the actor who plays Stan, may also play any and all of the characters listed below:

- i. Two Prizefighters -
- ii. Referee
- iii. Bookie

## PROLOGUE

SPOTLIGHT STAN on Stage: (intermittent Mexican and Welsh instrumental music playing in background)

Ladies and gentlemen, before we begin, I'd like to tell you a few things about the events leading up to tonight's championship bout. I was a spectator, a fan, who witnessed the big fight that night, at the Olympic Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles, September 19th, 1980. This was the World Boxing Council Championship for the Bantamweight Title of the World. In one corner of the ring we had Lupe Pintor, the pride of Cuajimalpa, Mexico, in the other we had the European Champion, Johnny Owen, the Welshman, from Merthyr Tydfil, United Kingdom. Johnny, twenty-four years old, at five-foot-six, had challenged the twenty-five-year-old, five-foot-one Pintor. There was a great deal of money at stake for both young men. The match was broadcast on television.

## **SETTING**

I'd like you to imagine you are in an arena with over 15,000 boisterous fans from all over the world; some inebriated. International cheers and jeers can be heard on all levels; from the ground floor to the rooftop tip-tops. Here is my play-by-play of this dramatic and historic night...

SPOTLIGHT STAN on Stage:

Stan: 'The Welsh Matchstick'

Came from across the sea,

Certainly to fight and not to flee...

With hopes of winning another championship title,

For him and Wales, you see.

Johnny Owen came to win the Bantamweight title from an olive-skinned bruiser named Lupe Pintor (Painter in English).

Newspaper pictures showed Johnny's face, pale and white, his body spindly with long-ostrich legs.

His virginal expression was kinda deceiving,

'cause he wasn't in L.A. for receiving.

Oh no, he was here to slug it out, not punk it out. No! Almost undefeated, he was Merthyr Tydfil's pride and joy.

His fans spent their hard-earned cash to cheer him on to victory in the City of Angels. They came from across the sea.

As always, his proud father was in his corner, nursing and training him throughout his fighting career. For your info, not every young prizefighter is skillful enough to whip the bejesus out of a bunch of Old Blighty's best fighters.

Ah, but you see dear Ringsiders, Johnny was yet an unknown in the U.S. Until now, he'd never fought anyone with Lupe's tough reputation.

Lupe Pintor came from Mexico, to whip the crap out of this pretty boy Lord Fauntleroy, aka Johnny. Ya see, 'cause like Johnny, Lupe needed the dough-ray-me, the moolah, the dinero, like all fighters do.

Pintor was not there to play.

He was there to get the pay.

Lupe, known for his focus, stalked his prey like a lithe panther. I rest my case on this! Whoa! But wait! Johnny was not just some tin-horn palooka who was gonna let Lupe's pre-fight jive talk bug him, intimidate him. No way, Jose! Ya see, Owen was known for his rough and tumble ways, displays of jabs and hooks, mixin' it up, definitely not a Humpty Dumpty sufferin' a great fall, y'all!

Johnny never played it safe in the squared circle before and you could be sure he wasn't gonna do it tonight.

Seated ringside in a dark suit, white shirt and tie.

Yeah, a regular square was I.

I heard through the grapevine,

This bout of fisticuffs was gonna be a real rumble.

Somebody was gonna tumble.

This ain't no Muhammad Ali in the jungle.

This was the Olympic Auditorium, in downtown L.A.

Lotsa rabble-rousers were present, none expectin' to yawn tonight. Yup! That wuz the buzz, cuz; the take from the inside line. Wow! I said to myself silently, unconsciously mustering up

strength through my parched lips; inferiority complex. I am impressed, for here I am, tonight. Shazam! Me, seated beneath the ring ropes,

Holy Cow!

If the guys in Brooklyn could only see me now!

Their boy, Stan the Man, was makin' the bigtime, sittin' near 'em media dudes from all around the globe, from who the hell knows where; in suits and ties, dressed more dapper than I. And some were sleazy, too.

Some were dressed like the FBI.

Made me wonder why.

Were they lookin' for spies? Damn! Saw newsmen with their big ole cameras snappin' away. Maybe they'll catch couple o' shots o' me? Coast to coast grinnin' like a Chessy Cat. Tsk! Can ya see me blushin'? Ha!

Suddenly my reverie gets busted again when someone yells, 'HEY, THERE'S GONNA BE A BIG BAD-ASS FIGHT ON TV TONIGHT!' - YAY! Then I heard another Big Bad Roar.

Could it've been a lion in this zoo?

No, it was the CROWD,

I'm tellin' you!

So, turning my noggin', I see the fighters; two dudes shufflin' down to the ringside. First, Johnny Owen, the skinny malink, in a red robe, red trunks, his name blazin' on the robe's back with WALES beneath. Then Lupe in white robe and white trunks, his name on robe, too. I soon realized, their weight seemed awful light; Johnny more so; feather light. Oh boy oh boy oh boy! Ya

know what I mean? Hot diggity-dog! - Oh, yeah, these guys're  
Bantamweights, but can they hit??

An 'Aha moment' happened! Hit me like a brick. Fireworks go off  
in my noodle: don't gotta let fighters weight fool ya. A  
dynamite stick packs more'n a mean wallop, and so does a  
firecracker in a kid's hand.

Gotta 'scuse my philosophy,  
Because it's New Yorkese,  
Not some freakin' disease.  
I eat cheese if you please!  
How 'bout these knees?

Ask 'em bees!

Lemme tell ya about me! At 16 boxing in the gym; the Police  
Athletic League. I caught a mean left hook from a flyweight,  
Made me shake and tremble, Grumble, and almost tumble,  
Felt drunker than a skunk drinkin' a Vodka Martini.  
Why, to this day, in my Brooklyn neighborhood

They still call me 'Canvasback'.  
Now how about that!?

Yeah, so ya know I ain't jivin' when I say,

Bigger they are the harder they fall,  
'Cause it's what's writ in boxing lore, y'all.

Now THE FIGHTERS, THE WARRIORS they've entered the ring, - the crowd is chanting with terribly loud, off-key voices, "HEY LUPIE! MATAR AL VAGABUNDO!" "HEY JOHNNY! KILL THE BLOOMIN' BUM!" followed by BOOM BOOM BOOM, like loud big bass drums on repeat. I coulda swore I felt the cracked cement floors of the old Olympic arena creaking from armies of miscreant fans rising and stomping, wanting for things to begin for BLOOD'S SAKE! I was edgier and more nervous than anyone else in the joint - Why? Was it ME who was gonna fight? - Them fans was the enemy, a bunch a Roman gawkers watchin' peeps thrown to the lions at the Coliseum! My stomach got tied in knots, butterflies alive in me all taken flight, but can't get out. All kindsa fright this night, Why? I kept askin', was it a portent of a superstitious me? Dunno. You ain't never gonna see a fight in no zoo, for sure, which, if ya think about it, proves animals are more civilized than we. Then Johnny came forward in the ring nodding his head proudly to the crowd to every side of the ring, and Lupe also showed his sculpted presence in the same manner to his fans.

Now the referee motions the fighters to the center of the ring.

You could tell by their eyes they was ready to swing.

I got a real good look:

Johnny was chalky, and tall, kind of bony and neat,  
arms like tapered steel springs,  
and a nose surprisingly Greek.

He wasn't called Matchstick Johnny Owen, for nothing. A  
Welshman, looked like a needle standing, sideways,

But a tough cookie, so said my bookie,  
Johnny's never been knocked off his feet.  
He's gonna be pretty damned tough to beat.

Now, this other guy looks like a bull, what's his name, Pintor?  
Yeah, wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley - yeah,  
no way! Yes, Lupe Pintor, was sizably shorter, but much broader  
compared to the warrior who looked like a needle. Pintor,  
athletically trim, olive-skinned, handsome, shoulders of a  
fullback, eyes - hot coals of fury,

And the way he held his big mitts...

I said,

"He looks like he can give you the Blitz,  
without playin' tricks."

Impatiently fidgeting, they did wait,  
Listening to the ref's instructions like a couple of race horses  
waiting to get out of the gate.

Pampered by trainers massaging their necks, they was like a  
couple of newborn babes in swaddle skivvies. The referee's  
ramble could be heard all over the joint, even in the Gents  
Room, loud and clear, even catch it where you bought your beer.  
He repeated the familiar phrases,

'Want a good clean fight.

Break when I say break.

Protect yourselves at all times,

No rabbit punches...

Can cost you the round!

Now come on boys!

Let's give 'em one helluva fight!'

Back to their corners they went for silent prayer, and for

destiny's bell to toll. Lupe the Mexican champion makes the sign  
of the cross with lightning speed. I thought I saw the champ  
from Wales bow his head, too.

A holy rite  
In everyone's sight.

Indian Braves on the warpath, naked from the chest up.

Two of the best,  
Must be heaven blessed.  
These Samurai marching into battle bravely...  
Never gravely.  
Accompanying music was the bell.  
As the roaring crowd began to swell.

While mariachi played off in the distance, I took a quick sip of  
my beer. BONG the bell! They charged at each other punching  
away. Johnny Owen was throwing jabs quick and fast. Lupe battled  
back. This was business! Where were the chariots? The fighters  
knew they were not there for a fling, 'cause,

Fancy footwork and bluffs  
Was goddamned rare with their brand of fisticuffs.